



Country Report

Journalists in Japan

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Backgrounds of Journalists

The typical journalist in Japan is male, in his mid-forties and holds a university degree. This data is the result of mail survey. Of the 747 journalists, 613 were male (82.1%) and 134 were female (17.9%). The average age of the sample was 41.25 years ($s=8.99$, median=41). As for educational background, 92.8 percent of the journalists have a Bachelor's degree and 6.3 percent have a Master's degree. 12.5 percent of the respondents have specialized in journalism or both in journalism and communication. This percentage seems very small compared with countries in Europe and North America. In Japan, on-the-job training has been established at media companies only recently.

Journalists in the Newsroom

In Japan, the mail survey was conducted only for journalists who have a full-time position (100%). Japanese journalists are fairly experienced. On average, they had worked as journalists for 16.94 years ($s=8.99$), and about half of them had more than 17 years of professional experience. Most journalists worked on a specific newsbeat (52.7%), such as domestic politics (44.8%), politics (18.8%), or crime and law (18.2%). The remaining 47.3 percent of the respondents indicated that they worked on various topics and subjects. The majority of respondents are working for the same media company that they joined the first time. Also, most of them did not have any other paid jobs (2.0%). Very few Japanese journalists are members of a professional association (3.8%).

The majority of Japanese journalists in the sample worked for newspapers (51.1%). Another 46.7 percent of the journalists worked for television and only few journalists in the sample reported they worked for news agencies (1.7%). As for their current position in newsrooms, 33.1 percent of the respondents were reporters, 31.3 percent were department heads, 16.0 percent were desk heads or assignment editors, and 13.5 percent were senior editors.

Journalistic Roles

With regard to professional role orientations, Japanese journalists found it most important to monitor and scrutinize political leaders, to provide analysis of current affairs, and to provide information people need to make political decisions (see Table 1). On the contrary, they did not find it important to support government policy, to convey a positive image of political leadership, and to be an adversary of government. It was evident that the relevance of these “democratic” roles was undisputed among Japanese journalists as the relatively low standard deviations indicate. Likewise, there was a strong consensus among the respondents over the little importance of contributing to the government. Still, a majority of journalists in Japan found it important to report things as they are, to monitor and scrutinize business, and to set the political agenda.

Following roles were supported by only a minority of respondents: motivating people to participate in political activity, supporting national development, being a detached observer, influencing public opinion, providing the kind of news that attracts the largest audience, providing advice, orientation and direction for daily life, advocating for social change, providing entertainment and relaxation, and letting people express their views.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	743	90.8	4.47	.69
Provide analysis of current affairs	743	84.7	4.22	.73
Provide information people need to make political decisions	743	83.0	4.27	.81
Report things as they are	744	65.1	3.81	.95
Monitor and scrutinize business	744	62.9	3.82	.86
Set the political agenda	746	60.5	3.73	.88
Motivate people to participate in political activity	744	48.7	3.47	1.09
Support national development	742	45.6	3.42	1.05
Be a detached observer	743	44.1	3.37	.94
Influence public opinion	745	43.1	3.33	1.06
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	743	39.2	3.26	1.00
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	742	39.2	3.25	.98
Advocate for social change	743	31.6	3.06	1.01
Provide entertainment and relaxation	743	25.3	3.01	.93
Let people express their views	744	24.3	2.83	1.04
Be an adversary of the government	742	10.4	2.24	.98
Convey a positive image of political leadership	745	1.1	1.60	.70
Support government policy	744	.8	1.69	.72

Question: Please tell me how important each of these things is in your work. 5 means you find them extremely important, 4 means very important, 3 means somewhat important, 2 means little importance, and 1 means unimportant.

Professional Ethics

Japanese journalists generally demonstrated a strong commitment to professional standards of ethics. The great majority of the respondents agreed that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (see Table 2). Furthermore, seven out of ten respondents disagreed with the views that their ethical decisions are a matter of personal judgment and that sometimes it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it. However, more than half of the journalists subscribed to the idea that journalists' ethical decisions depend on the specific situation.

The picture was mixed with regard to a selected number of potentially controversial reporting practices. A large majority of journalists in Japan found the use of confidential business or government documents without authorization, the use of recreations or dramatizations of news by actors, and the use of hidden microphones or cameras justifiable at least on occasion (see Table 3). Two out of five respondents thought it was justified (either always or on occasion) to exert pressure on unwilling informants to get a story, to get employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information, to pay people for confidential information, and to make use of personal documents (such as letters and pictures) without permission. Only a minority of journalists found it permissible to claim to be somebody else, to alter or fabricate quotes from sources, and to alter photographs. The practice of "brown envelope journalism" – that is, journalists taking money from sources, presumably in return for positive coverage – was almost unanimously condemned by Japanese journalists.

Table 2: Ethical orientations of journalists

	N	Percentage saying “strongly” and “somewhat agree”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context	742	85.0	4.21	.77
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	740	55.5	3.44	.97
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	740	34.1	2.96	1.05
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	741	26.3	2.77	1.05

Question: The following statements describe different approaches to journalism. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree. 5 means you strongly agree, 4 means somewhat agree, 3 means undecided, 2 means somewhat disagree, and 1 means strongly disagree.

Table 3: Justification of controversial reporting methods by journalists

	N	Percentage saying “always justified”	Percentage saying “justified on occasion”
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	740	22.3	69.5
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	735	16.3	71.4
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	735	1.4	39.2
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	736	1.1	38.9
Using hidden microphones or cameras	741	.9	70.0
Paying people for confidential information	741	.8	47.4
Claiming to be somebody else	742	.3	22.6
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	739	.1	38.6
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	743	.1	2.7
Altering photographs	741	.1	8.8
Accepting money from sources	742	.0	4.6

Question: Given an important story, which of the following, if any, do you think may be justified on occasion and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?

Professional Autonomy and Influences

Journalists in Japan reported a moderate degree of professional autonomy. 54.2 percent of them responded that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories. With a total of 60.1 percent, the number of respondents who had complete or a great deal of freedom in deciding over what aspects to emphasize in a news story was even higher.

News production is influenced by a variety of factors. Among the potential sources of influences mentioned in the interview, “military, police and state security” fared on top of the list among Japanese respondents (see Table 4). Furthermore, a majority of journalists found their work substantively constrained by time limits, journalism ethics, as well as their personal values and beliefs. Also, slightly less than half of the respondents admitted their work was influenced by managers of the news organization, by editorial supervisors and higher editors, by competing news organizations, and by editorial policy. Three out of ten journalists were influenced by information access (or lack thereof), by the availability (or non-availability) of news-gathering resources, by media laws and regulation, by owners of the news organization, by feedback from the audience, by their peers on the staff, and by audience research and data.

Overall, internal factors were found to be more influential than external constraints. Japanese journalists felt little influenced by sources from within the political and civic realm: pressure groups, government officials, censorship, public relations, and religion. They also reported only minor influence from friends, acquaintances and family as well as from colleagues in other media.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very influential"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Military, police and state security	740	75.5	4.03	.96
Time limits	741	63.2	3.75	.86
Journalism ethics	739	61.7	3.77	.87
Your personal values and beliefs	743	55.2	3.62	.88
Managers of the news organization	745	49.8	3.48	.96
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	745	47.4	3.43	.90
Competing news organizations	741	46.6	3.45	.82
Editorial policy	742	42.3	3.35	.92
Information access	730	38.9	3.31	.91
Availability of news-gathering resources	721	30.2	3.13	.84
Media laws and regulation	737	28.4	3.02	.96
Owners of the news organization	741	28.3	2.87	1.19
Feedback from the audience	743	28.3	3.12	.79
Your peers on the staff	745	26.4	3.05	.83
Audience research and data	740	26.4	3.00	.90
Advertising considerations	743	15.3	2.49	1.03
Colleagues in other media	743	14.1	2.54	.94
Friends, acquaintances and family	741	13.5	2.45	.99
Profit expectations	741	11.5	2.32	.99
Religious considerations	740	6.8	2.04	.92
Public relations	736	6.3	2.25	.86
Censorship	737	5.4	1.82	.92
Government officials	740	4.7	1.92	.87
Pressure groups	741	2.2	1.82	.76

Question: Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work. 5 means it is extremely influential, 4 means very influential, 3 means somewhat influential, 2 means little influential, and 1 means not influential.

Journalism in Transition

Journalism is currently in a state of change. According to Japanese journalists, the use of search engines and the importance of technical skills had most profoundly changed over the last five years (see Table 5). Overall, the journalists' responses point to a substantive deterioration of working conditions in the profession. A majority of respondents reported an increase in their average working hours. Furthermore, most interviewed journalists felt that the time available for researching stories and the credibility of journalism had dropped.

Influences on journalists have increased for all sources mentioned in Table 6. Here, it was especially the influence of social media and user-generated contents (such as blogs) that had strengthened the most during the past five years. Still, three out of five respondents felt an increase in the influence of audience feedback, audience research, profit making pressures, ethical standards, and audience involvement in news production. Half of the Japanese journalists reported an increase for advertising considerations and competition.

The questions about changes in journalism were only presented to journalists who had five years or more of professional experience.

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "increased"	Percentage saying has "decreased"
The use of search engines	621	85.7	1.1
Technical skills	622	64.1	10.8
Average working hours of journalists	621	58.1	11.3
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	621	38.2	16.9
The relevance of journalism for society	616	27.1	26.1
The credibility of journalism	621	14.3	57.5
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	618	13.1	29.3
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	621	8.7	20.0
Time available for researching stories	620	8.5	59.4
Having a university degree	622	5.8	19.8

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Japan. 5 means they have increased a lot, 4 means they have somewhat increased, 3 means there has been no change, 2 means they have somewhat decreased, and 1 means they have decreased a lot.

Table 6: Changes in influences on journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "strengthened"	Percentage saying has "weakened"
Social media	620	88.4	1.6
User-generated contents, such as blogs	618	78.3	2.3
Audience feedback	616	63.5	3.4
Audience research	615	61.8	2.9
Profit making pressures	613	61.5	2.8
Ethical standards	619	59.9	14.2
Audience involvement in news production	614	59.1	3.7
Advertising considerations	614	52.4	5.7
Competition	615	51.5	7.2
Public relations	606	44.1	2.6
Pressure toward sensational news	614	35.5	6.4
Journalism education	614	35.2	18.7
Western ways of practicing journalism	613	14.4	11.9

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in Japan. 5 means they have strengthened a lot, 4 means they have somewhat strengthened, 3 means they did not change, 2 means they have somewhat weakened, and 1 means they have weakened a lot.

Methodological Information

<i>Size of the population:</i>	25,200 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	purposive quota sampling for newsrooms and simply systematic for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	747 working journalists
<i>survey methods:</i>	mail/e-mail
<i>Response rate:</i>	33.9%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	02/2013-03/2013